



47.1967.1 Virgil I. Grissom  
Lawrence County  
Marker Text Review Report  
08/24/2014

### **Marker Text**

Born in Mitchell, Indiana. Lieutenant Colonel Grissom flew the project Mercury sub-orbital mission, July 21, 1961. He was command pilot, first Gemini flight, March 23, 1965, and died in an Apollo spacecraft at Cape Kennedy, January 27, 1967.

### **Report**

Current IHB guidelines require primary source documentation to support all information on a marker. This marker was placed under review because IHB had few sources on file. The marker possesses no factual errors, but does lack detail regarding Grissom's influence on the course of American space exploration.

This marker faithfully details important aspects of Gus Grissom's life and career. Virgil "Gus" Grissom was born in Mitchell, Indiana on April 3, 1926.<sup>1</sup> Grissom grew up in Mitchell and enlisted as an aviation cadet in the winter of 1943. He reported for duty on August 8, 1944 at the induction center in Indianapolis and received an assignment at an Army Air Corps base in Sheppard Field, Texas. After World War II ended, Grissom left the Air Corps to attend college. He attended Purdue University from 1946-1950 and graduated with a BS in mechanical engineering. Grissom reenlisted directly after graduating and earned his pilot wings thirteen months later, at Randolph Air Force Base in Texas.<sup>2</sup>

In 1959, Grissom applied to the Mercury program and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) selected him to among the first group of United States astronauts.<sup>3</sup> These astronauts took part in Project Mercury, the first American space initiative. NASA chose Alan Shepard for the first manned space flight attempted by the United States. He launched into space on May 5, 1961 and returned safely after a fifteen minute and twenty-two second flight.<sup>4</sup> Grissom duplicated this feat on July 21, 1961;<sup>5</sup> as a result of this flight's success, NASA gained the confidence to prepare a fully orbital spaceflight.<sup>6</sup>

Gus Grissom continued to contribute to NASA's space exploration throughout his short career. In 1964, he developed the trisextant, a device that would allow astronauts to calculate their exact position in space without any complex equipment.<sup>7</sup> He piloted the first manned Gemini flight on March 23, 1965.<sup>8</sup> Grissom later belonged to the first crew of the Apollo program, a program geared towards the ultimate goal of a lunar landing. The fledgling Apollo program experienced a shock on January 27, 1967, when a fire broke out during a flight simulation. The fire killed Virgil "Gus" Grissom and his two crew members.<sup>9</sup>

### **Learn More**

Science and innovation magazine Dvice offers a retrospective of Grissom's NASA years and his contributions to the space program [here](#), and you can access audio-visual materials related to Grissom's career from the [Free Libs archive](#). Many books are available about Grissom and the history of Space exploration. Click the book titles to find them in a library near you.



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Carl L. Chappell, [\*Seven Minus One: The Story of Gus Grissom\*](#) (Madison, IN, 1968).

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<sup>1</sup> 1930 United States Census (Population Schedule), Mitchell City, IN, sheet no. 5B, line 36, accessed [Fold3.com](#). U.S. Social Security Death Index, 1935-2014 Database (Provo, UT: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2011), accessed [AncestryLibrary.com](#).

<sup>2</sup> "Family Proud of Spaceman," *Logansport [IN] Pharos-Tribune*, April 10, 1959. (All newspapers accessed via [NewspaperARCHIVE.com](#) unless otherwise noted.)

Grissom's detailed military records file is available for reproduction from [The National Archives](#). Grissom's [official NASA biography](#) confirms the details of his military service, and NASA Historian Mary C. White offers details of Grissom's Air Force years in her [biographical essay](#).

<sup>3</sup> "Airmen Start Study of Atlas," *Logansport [IN] Press*, September 22, 1959, 6; National Aeronautics and Space Administration, *Project Mercury: A Chronology* (1963), NASA special publication- 4001, Part II (A) accessed 8/27/2014, <http://history.nasa.gov/SP-4001/p2a.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> *Project Mercury*, Part III (A); "Space Pilot Grissom Gets Stiff Rehearsal," *Hammond [IN] Times*, March 1, 1961, 22; "His Wife Says: It's Wonderful, Beautiful," *Logansport [IN] Pharos-Tribune*, May 5, 1961, 5.

<sup>5</sup> "He Swims to Fame—Hoosier Grissom Streaks Fastest Suborbital Arc Through Space," *Terre Haute[IN] Star*, July 22, 1961.

<sup>6</sup> "Kennedy Talks to Grissom, Signs \$1-8Billion Space Race Measure," *Terre Haute[IN] Star*, July 22, 1961.

<sup>7</sup> "Space Position Possible with New Instrument," *The Anderson [IN] Herald*, January 30, 1964, 20.

<sup>8</sup> "Gus Grissom Picked for First Gemini-moon Test," *Logansport [IN] Pharos-Tribune*, April 13, 1964; "Grissom, Young Studying Volcanic Formations Such As Moon May Hold," *Valparaiso [IN] Vidette Messenger*, April 14, 1964; "Grissom Give Next Space Ship Approval," *Anderson [IN] Herald*, May 8, 1964; "United States Space Twins Return to Launching Site," *Anderson [IN] Daily Bulletin*, March 25, 1965; Barton C. Hacker and James M. Grimwood, *On the Shoulders of Titans: A History of Project Gemini* (1977), NASA Special Publication-4203, accessed 8/25/2014, <http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/pao/History/SP-4203/ch10-5.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> "3 Apollo Crewmen Die in Launching Pad Test," *Anderson [IN] Herald*, January 28, 1967; U.S. Social Security Death Index.